

Classification: Open	Decision Type: Key
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Report to:	Cabinet	Date: 04 December 2024
Subject:	Whitefield Town Centre Plan – Proposed Adoption	
Report of	Leader and Cabinet Member for Strategic Growth	

Summary

1. This report outlines the feedback received during consultation on the draft Whitefield Town Centre Plan and seeks approval for adoption of the Whitefield Town Centre Plan to guide future investment and development within Whitefield town centre.
2. The Whitefield Town Centre Plan’s proposals are high-level and aim to improve the town centre area for communities, businesses, and the environment. Prior to implementation, all proposals will require further work to agree details and will be subject to further engagement with relevant stakeholders. Funding will also be required for implementation.

Recommendation(s)

3. Note the key themes outlined in response to consultation on the draft document
4. Accept the post consultation amendments to the document
5. Approve the revised Whitefield Town Centre Plan as the final version and adoption as the Council’s policy document for the future development of the town.
6. To agree to the principle of utilising a minimum of 10% of the gross capital receipt received for small-scale capital investments to support the Whitefield Town Plan and support community initiatives.
7. To agree the use of the Whitefield Town Centre Plan as a material consideration for the determination of planning applications

Reasons for recommendation(s)

8. The Whitefield Town Centre Plan provides a vision to guide the future investment in the town centre.

Alternative options considered and rejected

9. No other options were considered

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Background

10. The Whitefield Town Centre Plan (hereafter referred to as the Plan) is a place making plan for Whitefield town centre, which will also include broader elements of improvement to the town across the themes of communities, businesses, and the environment.
11. The Plan will guide investment in Whitefield town centre and help the town transition into being a thriving 21st Century High Street.
12. Work on the plan commenced after Whitefield was selected to receive High Street Task Force support at Cabinet in March 2022. In March 2023, further Cabinet approval was sought to appoint consultants, Planit, and to further develop the findings of the High Street Task Force and progress with a consultation process to create a vision for investment into Whitefield town centre.
13. This report outlines the steps taken in the Plan's development and considers potential next steps.

Early Consultation and the High Street Task Force

14. The High Street Task Force is an initiative to help support the revitalisation and transformation of town centres and high streets. It provides advice, training, and data analysis to Local Authorities.
15. Early-stage consultation with residents and stakeholders took place in March 2023, and then from May to June 2023. This comprised face to face meetings and an online questionnaire.
16. Over 250 participants fed back; key findings included:
 - Whitefield lacks a centre, there is a lack of variety of things to do, and the area is dominated by traffic.
 - The main reason for 36% of responders for visiting Whitefield was related to shopping
 - 51% of people wanted to see more food and beverage markets/ events, and
 - 64% wanted changes relating to parks and green spaces.
17. The Task Force produced three reports relating to Whitefield, which recommended a series of potential interventions which could be undertaken by the Council or other stakeholders. The data from the above sessions and questionnaires fed into the draft Plan, which was then subject to further consultation.

Consultation on the draft Plan

18. Consultation on the draft Plan ran from 22nd January 2024 to 25th March 2024, with a final session in October 2024.
19. Efforts were made to maximise engagement with local stakeholders, including:
 - a. Dedicated Whitefield Town Centre Plan pages being created on the Council's websites, which contained the full draft Plan, the executive

- summary, an abridged “about” page, which concisely outlined the information from the plan, and a link to a survey hosted on MS forms;
- b. Pop-up consultation sessions hosted on Friday 2nd February and on Saturday 3rd February in the foyer of Morrisons, Whitefield;
- c. Meeting with Bury Blind Society members on Wednesday 7th February;
- d. Meeting with members of Philips High School’s pupil leadership team on Tuesday 12th March;
- e. Leafleting of local businesses with flyers containing QR codes;
- f. Press releases;
- g. Social media;
- h. Distribution of weblinks to community and business contacts/ stakeholders;
- i. Community Hub updates via the weekly Whitefield newsletter; and
- j. Meeting with the Whitefield Business Group

Consultation responses

- 20. Over 251 stakeholders provided feedback on the proposals, comments were invited too.
- 21. The draft Plan’s proposals were grouped into sixteen questions. The items which received most support were:
 - a. Improve crossing points for pedestrians and cyclists on Bury New Road and on Higher Lane;
 - b. Plant new trees, create wildflower areas, and install box planters in Whitefield town centre; and
 - c. The proposals for “Whitefield Common”, which included moving the existing medical centre to the former library, leaving the Uplands site open for sensitive residential development
- 22. Key areas of concern or ambivalence which came up in the detailed feedback included:
 - a. Concern around parking availability, particularly near to Slattery;
 - b. Fears that improving active travel infrastructure would be inappropriate, due to road width, lack of demand, and the potential of additional congestion being created;
 - c. Ambivalence over potential changes to Bury New Road – around 2/3 of responders wanted the road to be kept as it is (often expressing fears that changes to the road would produce more congestion). Around 1/3 wanted footpath space to be increased for the benefit of pedestrians, cyclists, or bus lanes;
 - d. Fear that partial or time restricted street closures would cause congestion and restrict the ability of emergency services to respond;
 - e. Concerns over current condition of highways and footways;
 - f. Increased costs relating to maintenance;
 - g. Frustration at a lack of community space to meet;
 - h. The draft Plan was too lengthy and often hard to understand; and

- i. The early stage proposal for the “Town of Hearts” place branding received a lukewarm reception.

Post Consultation Amendments to the draft Plan

23. Following a detailed analysis and full consideration of all consultation responses, several changes are proposed. Some key changes are noted below:

- a. Clearer language and layout – the Plan’s word count has been significantly reduced and the language made easier to understand. The proposals have been set out in a concise action plan table;
- b. Further detail added to the Uplands proposals and a slight change to proposals relating to public open space;
- c. Removal of the “town of hearts” concept, due to implementation difficulties regarding the “little cultural quarter” and “little maker’s quarter” and a lukewarm response to the “town of hearts place branding”;
- d. Amendments to transportation related proposals – a commitment to carry out various audits of Whitefield’s roads relating to suitability for improved active travel infrastructure, car parking demand, and vehicle count data;
- e. More explicit regard for heritage – particularly relating to the Uplands proposals, street furniture improvements, and investment in public realm (particularly in or near to the Conservation Area);
- f. The proposals could include the installation of local planters (subject to agreements that identified local businesses would maintain them), improved signage and way-pointing, small public realm improvements and potentially shop-front improvements (subject to co-investment);
- g. Proposals to increase support for events in Whitefield; and
- h. Clarification on green space proposals – with a trial extension of community management of some green space in Whitefield

Funding, delivery, and next steps

24. The Plan will guide the development of Whitefield, with proposals being brought forward as funding is secured. Each proposal will be subject to further consultation with relevant stakeholders.
25. Options to retain a percentage of receipts made from sales of land and property in and around the town centre are being explored. This funding could be used to help fund the proposals in the Plan.
26. The funding landscape regarding grants from central government is still unclear following the October budget. Opportunities will be pursued once they come available.

Conclusion

27. The recommendations contained at the beginning of this report will enable the Council to work towards more detailed design and implementation of the key proposals of the plan, in the short, medium and long term.

Links with the Corporate Priorities:

Please summarise how this links to the Let's Do It Strategy.

28. Elements of the Plan touch on all elements of the Let's Strategy
29. The Plan is particularly focused on Let's Enterprise element - under section Investing in all our town centres the Council notes that it will "continue to support the vitality of [Whitefield] town centre where opportunities arise"

Equality Impact and Considerations:

*Please provide an explanation of the outcome(s) of an initial or full EIA and make **specific reference regarding the protected characteristic of Looked After Children**. Intranet link to EIA documents is [here](#).*

29. A full EQIA has been completed with all impacts mitigated to neutral or positive impacts

Environmental Impact and Considerations:

*Please provide an explanation of the Environmental impact of this decision. Please include the impact on both **Carbon emissions** (contact climate@bury.gov.uk for advice) and **Biodiversity** (contact c.m.wilkinson@bury.gov.uk for advice)*

30. The Plan would likely be neutral in terms of carbon emissions. One of the Plan's objectives is to make it easier to walk, wheel, and cycle around Whitefield and to support this, various transport related improvements such as enhancement to junctions for these users or the proposed development of a car club could help to reduce emissions. The embodied emissions, however, in e.g., reconstructing junctions in the town centre, possibly altering Bury New Road (subject to the results of audits), the development of the garages at Victoria Lane, and the development around the Uplands need to be considered.
31. The Plan would likely improve biodiversity. Proposed development at, for example, the garages at Victoria Lane, and the development around the Uplands would be subject to biodiversity net gain.
32. The Plan's proposals are still high-level and, therefore, the above is estimated. Further research into their impact on carbon emissions and biodiversity should be undertaken as projects develop.

Assessment and Mitigation of Risk:

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
No funding currently assigned to deliver the projects	Find funding

Legal Implications:

33. The proposed Whitefield Town Centre Plan is a non-statutory, informal document. There are therefore no statutory requirements for consultation or adoption of the document. If approved by Cabinet, it will not form part of the statutory development plan but it will be a material consideration to which regard may be had in consideration of planning applications.

Financial Implications:

34. The proposal is to utilise 10% of receipts generated from local land and property sales through the Accelerated Land Disposal programme. This would have a marginal impact on the level of capital receipts obtained through land sales by the Council.
35. Any proposals brought forward as a result of this Town Centre Plan for Whitefield would need to be fully costed and would be subject to financial viability appraisals at the time based on the available sources of funding including that mentioned above.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Whitefield Town Centre Plan

Background papers:

Please list any background documents to this report and include a hyperlink where possible.

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning